PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Faidherbia albida (Delile) A. Chev.

GENUS *Faidherbia* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES White-thorn, Apple ring acacia

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Seeds, Leaves, Young pods, Gum

The seeds are boiled, then re-boiled and the skins removed then eaten in times of food scarcity. This is done to remove toxic components.
The pods are sometimes eaten.
The pods are used for flavouring. The gum is edible and is also used for sweets.
Caution: The seeds can contain hydrogen cyanide and would need to be cooked.

DESCRIPTION

A very large spreading tree. It grows up to 20-31 m tall. The trunk can be 1 m across. The trunk is light grey. The leaves are fine and drooping. The leaves can be light green or blue-green. The twigs are white and smooth. It has thorns which are straight and 4 cm long. They are white at the base and brown at the tips. They occur in pairs. Each leaf has 4-8 side branches although there can be 2-12 branches. These carry 6-23 pairs of small oblong leaflets. The leaf stalk does not have glands. It is leafless during the rainy season and has leaves during the dry season. The flowers are long cream spikes. The pods are large - about 10 cm long by 2.5 cm wide. They are red brown and twisted or almost curled into a ring. The pods do not burst open. The pods contain several hard shiny seeds. These are edible after processing. The seeds are 9-11 mm long by 6-8 mm wide.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It mostly grows on river banks and river flats and can grow on sandy soils. It can be damaged by frost. It grows in dry savannah but prefers damp sites and river banks. In southern Africa it grows between 40-1,070 m altitude. It grows in areas with an annual rainfall between 20-1,800 mm. It can grow in arid places. It grows in the Sahel. It has a deep taproot that needs to reach ground water.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants can be grown from seeds. The seeds are put in boiling water and soaked overnight then planted. It can be cut back and will re-grow. Although fresh seeds will grow, it is best to put seeds in boiling water to 5 minutes then allowing it to cool. It is best to sow seeds where they are to grow.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Trees grow quickly. They can be 7 m high in 3 years. It develops its first fruit after 2-15 years. A large tree can yield a ton of pods.

NOTES

There are about 1,350 Acacia species. Over 1,000 occur in Australia. Also as Mimosaceae.

PICTURES

Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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French, B.R. & Maynard, A.R. Food Plants International Database. Food Plants International

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